



The Best of Sicily Tour - 12 days

11 nights/12 days Private Tour of Sicily with vehicle and local English speaking driver escort, land package only, including experiences as cheese making, wine tastings, lunch at home and Etna Volcano off road route.



Location

Agrigento



Days

12



Duration

12 Days



Category

Multi Days



Season

All Year



Tour Type

Private

TOUR OVERVIEW

Route:

Land: Palermo airport (PMO – Falcone Borsellino International Airport), West Side

Leave: Catania airport (CTA – Fontanarossa International Airport), East Side

Day 1 – LAND: Palermo airport (PMO – Falcone Borsellino International Airport)/Town

Day 2 – Palermo and Street Food Tour

Day 3 – Palermo/Cefalù and Monreale/Palermo

Day 4 – Palermo/Erice, Lunch in an olive oil farmhouse, Salt Way Road/Marsala

Day 5 – Marsala Salt pans, Winery and Turkish Steps/Agrigento

Day 6 – Agrigento and Piazza Armerina/Syracuse

Day 7 – Syracuse AM (visit: Archaeological Park and Ortigia). PM at leisure

Day 8 – Syracuse/Off the Beaten Track: cheese, wine and tuna fishing village/Syracuse

Day 9 – Syracuse/Ragusa, Lunch in a local family and Modica/Taormina

Day 10 – Taormina//Etna Volcano Off Road Experience and Farmhouse/Taormina

Day 11 – Taormina AM. PM at leisure

Day 12 – Taormina/LEAVE: Catania airport (CTA: Fontanarossa International Airport)

Included Licensed Local Guide:

Palermo: full day

Monreale: visit to the Dome

Agrigento: visit to the Valley of the Temples

Piazza Armerina: visit to the Roman Villa of Casale

Syracuse: half day

Taormina: half day

TOUR CODE: BEST12

TOUR ITINERARY



Day 1

Palermo airport/Town

Private Vehicle and Italian Speaking Driver: transfer in only

Welcome to the warm, beautiful and pleasant island of Sicily! Upon arrival at Palermo airport (PMO | Your Arrival by TBA) please proceed through Passport Control and collect your luggage inside the customs area. Then transfer at hotel.



Day 2

Palermo and Street Food Tour

Private Vehicle and Italian Speaking Driver Disposal: full day from h 9AM

English Speaking Local Guide Included for: full day from h 9AM

Today our tour starts to the visit to the Palatine Chapel (Admission fee: not included) located within the Palazzo dei Normanni (Norman Palace). The chapel is the finest example of Arab-Norman art in Palermo. Built by Roger II from 1130 to 1140, the chapel is adorned with extraordinary Norman-Byzantine mosaics. Together the palace and its chapel are the greatest attractions of Palermo and the only must-see sight for visitors with limited time. After the Normans left, the palace fell into serious decay until it was discovered by Spanish viceroys. In 1555, they began to restore it and it became a royal residence once again. Today, the Palazzo dei Normanni is the seat of Sicily's semi-autonomous regional government. We then continue onto the Four Corners which is the junction in Palermo. Effectively, it is the centre point of the four areas of the old town centre. You will almost inevitably pass through it and it is worth stopping for five minutes to have a look at its sculptures which were commissioned by the Spanish Viceroy in 1611. The sculptures on each of the four corners depict a variety of themes, including the four seasons, four Spanish kings and the four patron saints of the old

town areas. Going south-east down Via Maqueda you will come across Piazza Pretoria which is home not only to a splendid fountain but several other impressive buildings including, on the right, the City Hall. The fountain, known for generations as the "Fountain of Shame", has an interesting history. It was originally built in 1555 by the Florentine sculpture Francesco Camiliani for a Tuscan villa owned by the Viceroy Pedro de Toledo. His son, on inheriting the villa in 1574, thought it a little too risqué for his tastes and sold it to the City of Palermo who erected it where it now stands. The large central fountain is the focal point for sixteen nude statues of nymphs, humans, mermaids and satyrs. If you imagine this being erected during the Inquisition, it is quite easy to imagine why it received its epithet, the "Fountain of Shame".

Later we start the Street Food Tour. It's important to know that Palermo is in fifth place according to the "top ten cities for street food" ranking published by several Travel News Paper. The uniqueness of street food from Palermo lies not only in its variety and in his goodness, but also in the ability that every dish has to tell a historical chapter of the Sicilian capital. So, if you come to Palermo you can't miss the chance to enjoy its extraordinary cuisine exploring 2,000 years of history: from the landing of Phoenicians to the one of Americans! With us you'll have the chance to taste the best street food, where only locals go to fill their big bellies! We start our street food walking tour through the old squares and markets of the city center. The itinerary includes several stops at bakeries, street vendors and old inns to taste the delicious street food of Palermo and a selection of Sicilian sweet wines. Along the walking tour you will enter places hung out only by real Sicilians. Each tasting will be made official by your Tour Leader who will share with you meal information and legends. Our Street Palermo Tour isn't just food! It also includes stops at the main historical squares and several hidden spots of the city center to offer participants a comprehensive overview of the artistic and historical evolution of the city.

Our Street Palermo Tour isn't just food! It also includes stops at the main historical squares and several hidden spots of the city center to offer participants a comprehensive overview of the artistic and historical evolution of the city. The Palermo Street Food ends in the early afternoon next to the Cathedral (Tips: not included) erected in 1185 by Walter Ophamil (or Walter of the Mill), the Anglo-Norman archbishop of Palermo and King William II's minister, on the area of an earlier Byzantine basilica. By all accounts this earlier church was founded by St. Gregory and was later turned into a mosque by the Saracens after their conquest of the city in the 9th century. Ophamil is buried in a sarcophagus in the church's crypt. The medieval edifice had a basilica plan with three apses, of which only some minor architectural elements survive today. The balance of the day is at leisure. (L)



Day 3

Palermo/Cefalù and Monreale/Palermo

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 9AM
Monreale, English Speaking Guide included to visit the Dome

Just one hour's drive east of Palermo, sitting serenely between its natural bay and the towering rocky granite mass of La Rocca, is Cefalù. For a small town, Cefalù offers a great deal, including sandy beaches, winding Mediaeval streets flanked with all manner of shops, excellent restaurants serving the freshest of fish and last but probably first, its unique Norman Cathedral. While Cefalù's origins go back to at least Greek times (the name derives from the ancient Greek word for "Cape"), the town we now know and love was built at the behest of the Norman King, Roger II. Construction of the Cathedral began in 1131 and is an exquisite example of what has been termed "Sicilian Romanesque". Thanks to the splendid mosaic of Christ Pantocrator above the altar, it is twinned with the Palatine Chapel in Palermo and the Duomo in Monreale. Seeing all three on a trip to Sicily is strongly recommended. Also of interest is the Mediaeval wash house - lavatoio - which is fed by a natural spring and the Osterio Magno which, according to tradition was King Roger's very own residence. It now houses art exhibitions.

This afternoon we then continue onto Monreale, to see where Arab-Norman art and architecture reached its pinnacle in the Duomo (Admission fee: not included), launched in 1174 by William II. It represents scenes from the Old and New Testaments all in golden mosaics. The story of how this splendid cathedral came into being starts when the Arabs took control of Palermo in 831. They transformed the cathedral into a mosque and banished the Bishop of Palermo from town. Not wishing to venture too far from his beloved cathedral, the Bishop settled in a small village in the hills overlooking Palermo, the site of modern-day Monreale. There, he built a modest church to keep the flame of local Christian worship alive. Some 240 years later, in 1072, the Normans drove the Arabs from Sicily, establishing Palermo as their capital and re-consecrating the Cathedral. In 1174, in an act of piety, thanksgiving and commemoration of the exiled Bishop, King William II ordered the construction of a new church in Monreale, dedicated to the Virgin Mary (one of the mosaics depicts King William II presenting the church to the Madonna). On its completion in 1182, Pope Lucius III elevated the splendid church to the status of metropolitan Cathedral. Enlightened, tolerant and appreciative of many aspects of North African and middle-eastern culture and art, William II employed the very best Arabic and Byzantine (as well as Norman) craftsmen to work on the cathedral. The result is a fabulous and fascinating fusion of architectural styles, artistic traditions and religious symbolism. In 2015, Arab-Norman Palermo and the cathedrals of Monreale and Cefalù were granted status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We then return to Palermo.



Day 4

Palermo/Erice, Lunch in an olive oil farmhouse, Salt Way Road/Marsala

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 8.30AM

Cable Car ride up & down Erice Tickets: not included. The tickets are payable cash on the spot and subject to weather forecast

Early departure this morning to tour western Sicily where you will first reach Erice upper town. The Elymians settled the medieval town of Erice, which was an important religious site associated with the goddess Venus. Wander through its ancient streets and visit some of the famous homemade pastry shops—world-famous for marzipan candies and other delicacies like almond and pistachio pastries.

Then, continue to an olive oil factory-farmhouse to enjoy a light lunch.

This afternoon travel to and through the Saltpans and Salt Way Road to see the historic salt flats between Trapani and Marsala, where the ancient tradition of harvesting salt from the sea is still practiced. The balance of the day is at leisure in Marsala. (L)



Day 5

Marsala Saltpans, Winery and Turkish Steps/Agrigento

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 8.30AM

Marsala Winery black-out: Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays

Today we visit the Marsala Saltpans at the Stagnone are particularly worth a visit and offer a truly unique landscape. Windmills, first introduced during mediaeval times, dot the horizon, a testament to how things were once done, though one or two continue to function, pumping water through the sluice gates into or out of the various basins. Piles of harvested salt, neatly covered with terracotta tiles, lie between the road and the basins waiting to be despatched. Later onto a local Winery for a snack and wine tastings.

This afternoon we then continue to see the Turkish Steps a splendid, blinding, white jewel that frames the clear blue sea. One cannot describe the view and communicate it all: you have to live immersed with all your five senses in the magic of this incredible cliff of white marl. It's a fascinating place, where centuries of rain and wind have carved a natural staircase and whose white color is made more dazzling by the

sunlight. The Turkish steps is not only a natural feature, but is also a part of local legends: it is said that the Saracen pirates (for the Sicilians, the "Turks", which is a negative connotation that indicates all the people that were once devoted to piracy), docked ships in the calm, clean waters, protected by the "Scala", and climbed these natural "steps" to reach the top of the cliff and raid local villages, including the village of Realmonte. We later drive to Agrigento. (S)



Day 6

Agrigento and Piazza Armerina/Syracuse

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 8.30AM Agrigento, English Speaking Guide included to visit the Valley of the Temples

Piazza Armerina, English Speaking Guide included to visit the Roman Villa

Today we visit Agrigento to visit the finest of all ancient Greek sites—the complete Doric Temples (Admission fee: not included), one of Sicily's most famous historical attractions. This is one of the most outstanding examples of Greater Greece art and architecture, and is one of the main attractions of Sicily as well as a national monument of Italy. The area was included in the UNESCO Heritage Site list in 1997. Founded as a Greek colony in the 6th century B.C., Agrigento became one of the leading cities in the Mediterranean world. Its supremacy and pride are demonstrated by the remains of the magnificent Doric temples that dominate the ancient town, much of which still lies intact under today's fields and orchards. This splendid archaeological park consists of eight temples (and various other remains) built between about 510 BC and 430 BC: the Temple of Hera, the Temple of Concordia, the Temple of Heracles, the Temple of Olympian Zeus, the Temple of Castor and Pollux, the Temple of Hephaestos, the Temple of Demeter, and the Temple of Asclepius (the God of Medicine). Apart from this latter, which is to be found on the banks of the Akragas river, all are situated in the same area on rocky crests south of modern day Agrigento (not really in a Valley at all!).

Later onto Piazza Armerina situated deep in the Sicilian hinterland, at 721 metres above sea level, one of Sicily's most frequented tourist spots. However, it is not the town that most people come to see, but the famous Villa Romana del Casale (Admission fee: not included). Built in the middle of the 4th Century AD as a hunting lodge by a Roman patrician (it is not known for sure who the owner was) the Villa is home to some of the best preserved and extensive examples of Roman mosaics spread over around 3500mt. The villa is one of the most luxurious of its kind. It is especially noteworthy for the richness and quality of the mosaics which decorate almost every room; they are the finest mosaics in situ anywhere in the Roman world. These extraordinarily vivid mosaics, probably produced by North African artisans, deal with numerous subjects, ranging from Homeric escapades and mythological scenes to portrayals of daily life, including the famous tableau of girls exercising in their "bikinis". Later departure for Syracuse.



Day 7

Syracuse

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: no

Taxi Service Disposal: to and from the Archaeological Park

Syracuse, English Speaking Local Guide included, half day from h 9AM

Today we visit Syracuse and the Archaeological Park (Admission fee: not included) highlights of which are the Greek Theatre, the Roman Amphitheatre and the Paradise Quarry. The resulting park contains some of the most extraordinary monuments that classical antiquity has left us and, given their degree of interest and importance, has few equals elsewhere in Italy. Even a quick stay in Syracuse must include a visit to this archaeological site. Then stroll through the streets of Ortygia Island, the heart of the city center, to visit the Dome. This delightful pedestrian square is home to the wonderful Cathedral built on the site of an ancient Temple of Athena as can clearly be seen from the original Doric

columns that were incorporated into the building's main structure. Also on this square is the beautifully symmetrical Baroque Palazzo Beneventano and the church of Santa Lucia, the town's patron saint. Later to the colourful daily Street Market, which sells a fantastic array of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat.

This afternoon is at leisure.



Day 8

Syracuse/Off the beaten track: Cheese, Wine and Tuna Fishing Village/Syracuse

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 9AM

Today we experience villages off the beaten track for a real Sicilian Experience: cheese factory, winery to experience local genuine dishes. Then this afternoon we drive just a few kilometers up the coast from Italy's southernmost point, in the deep south-east of Sicily, is one of Sicily's prettiest seaside villages: Marzamemi. It was the Arabs of the 10th century who put Marzamemi on the map. They not only gave the village its poetic name, Mars? al-hamam (translating as something like Turtle Dove Bay) but also built the original tonnara (tuna processing plant), which was to become one of the most important on the island. Although the tonnara itself is no longer in function, Marzamemi continues its artisanal fishing and processing activities, producing all manner of delicacies, including canned tuna, dried tuna roe (bottarga), smoked swordfish, marinated anchovies, seafood pasta condiments, tuna salamis and much more besides! On the south side is the little fishing harbour with its bobbing fleet of colourful wooden boats, on the others a series of charming buildings, including the Church of San Francesco di Paola, the tonnara, the prince's aristocratic palazzo and a row of fishermen's houses, whose sky blue doors and potted red geraniums lend a chromatic vivacity to the whole picture. Narrow streets lead off the main square, offering glimpses of the turquoise sea to the east and north. Later in the afternoon we then return to Syracuse. (S)



Day 9

Syracuse/Ragusa, Meet Local for a lunch at home and Modica/Taormina

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 8.30AM

Today departure for Ragusa to visit one of the most fascinating towns in Sicily, Ragusa has caused many a visitor's jaw to drop as they first set eyes on the lower part of the town. Essentially Baroque, the Ragusa you will see today dates almost entirely from 1693. Indeed, it was in this year that Ragusa, along with its neighbours, Noto, Modica, Scicli and Catania, was razed to the ground by a terrible earthquake that hit most of the eastern side of Sicily. Public opinion on where to rebuild the town was divided, and so a compromise was made. The wealthier, more aristocratic citizens built a new town in a different site, now Ragusa "Superiore", while the other half of the population decided to rebuild on the original site, on a ridge at the bottom of a gorge, now Ragusa Ibla. The two towns remained separated until 1926 when they were merged to become the chief town of the province, taking the place of Modica. While the upper part has its fair share of architectural delights, it is the smaller Ragusa Ibla down below that really draws visitors. Whether you approach it from Modica to the south or from Ragusa Superiore, the sight of the jumble of houses, churches and civic palazzi piled on top of each other, clinging to the walls of the gorge, is really quite breathtaking. Although seemingly Mediaeval from a distance, once you enter the town's heart, the Baroque logic of its plan becomes more obvious.

Later transfer in a local family house for our Lunch in Family. Today meet the local people in their house to taste the real local genuine dishes.

This afternoon onto Modica. Like the other towns in the Val di Noto, was badly damaged in the 1693

earthquake and largely rebuilt in Sicilian Baroque style. It is divided into two parts, “higher” Modica and “lower” Modica, which are connected by numerous flights of steps. Palazzi and houses rise from the bottom of the gorge seemingly stacked one on top of the other. Magnificent churches, with their inspiring domes, bell towers and intricate facades, punctuate the red-tiled roofs and one is struck by the uniform beauty of the whole. Modica has a long and varied history, complete with the usual toing and froing of successions of invaders. It came to real prominence in 1296, when Frederick II of Aragon (not to be confused with Frederick II “Stupor Mundi”) formed the “County of Modica”, a kind of “state within a state” that was initially governed by Manfredi I Chiaramonte. Modica is custodian of a 400 year tradition of Sicilian chocolate-making. Being part of the Spanish kingdom for so many years meant that Sicily was often one of the first recipients of the new foodstuffs being brought back from South America. Cacao was one of these and today Modica still specialises in making granulous chocolate, often flavoured with chilli pepper, cinnamon or vanilla, that is based on Aztec methods and recipes. Chocolate shops abound and, for the real chocoholic, it is sometimes possible to watch the “chocolatiers” at work. Tasting of Modica chocolate is a must. Then we then continue to Taormina (L)



Day 10

Taormina

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: NO

Taormina, English Speaking Local Guide included for half day walking tour from h 9AM

Today visit Taormina: enjoy a drink at the tables of Caffè Wunderbar (or similar) in Piazza IX Aprile may set you back a few euros, but you'll be basking where Tennessee Williams and Elizabeth Taylor basked before you. As well as the famed Greek-Roman Theatre (Admission fee: not included), there are several minor sites to be discovered around Taormina. The attractive principal thoroughfare, Corso Umberto is pedestrian and ideal for strolling and window-shopping. Picturesque lanes above and below the Corso are interesting to explore, while if you want to stretch your legs further there are attractive walks up into the hills, or down to the sea. Given its compact size, Taormina has a huge range of bars, cafes and restaurants where you can while away pleasant hours while admiring the views. The balance of the day is at leisure.



Day 11

Taormina/Etna Jeep Ride WD4X4 Land Rover and Winery/Taormina

Ascent to the Etna Summit: NO. This excursion is up to 1.500 mt.

Private Jeep WD4X4 Land Rover with English Speaking Driver Escort, full day from h 8.30AM

DRESS CODE: dress in layers and use sturdy shoes

Today meet the off-road's driver and transfer to Etna Volcano. Our first stop is the the 2002 lava flow reachable by jeep through a winding dirt road surrounded by chestnut and oak forests. The 2002 eruption lasted from October 27th to January 29th 2003 and it is considered one of the most explosive eruptions of the past one hundred years. Continuing our excursion we will reach the Ragabo pine forest where hidden among pines and brooms, we will discover the cave of Corruccio (1350 meters above sea level) a cave formed by flowing lava.

Later we travel through one of the most beautiful Wine Roads of Sicily and crossing large expanses of vineyards (Etna D.O.C.), we will stop at a local farmhouse. This is the ideal place to enjoy relaxing moments surrounded by nature while sampling local cuisine and excellent wines. In fact, the wines are complemented by uniquely local delicacies. Light lunch in a local winery-farmhouse with wine.

This afternoon we then return to Taormina (L)

Taormina/Catania airport

Private Vehicle and Italian Speaking Driver Disposal: transfer out only

Today departure for Fontanarossa Catania airport (CTA | Your Departure by TBA)

TOUR MAP



WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- ✓ Airport transfers
- ✓ English speaking Driver
- ✓ Italian speaking Driver
- ✓ Licensed Local Guide as per program
- ✓ Meal as per Description
- ✓ Private vehicle as per itinerary
- ✓ The book Peoples of Sicily in complimentary (one for each room) with a special signature by the authors
- ✓ VAT

NOT INCLUDED

- ✗ Admission fees
- ✗ Beverage and meal not specified
- ✗ City taxes
- ✗ Fee for luggage handling fee at hotel
- ✗ Gratuities and tips
- ✗ Hotel accommodation
- ✗ Intercontinental/Local Flights
- ✗ Porterage at airport
- ✗ Travel Insurance